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ABSTRACT

In this paper it is argued that successful parenting techniques can be applied by classroom teachers to increase their teaching effectiveness. Based on a review of research on effective parenting, three factors were identified as being especially important to parenting success: (1) the use of affect when controlling children, (2) the organization of the setting for learning, and (3) the verbal direction and organization of the child's work. Each of these factors is discussed, relevant research is cited, and implications for teaching are presented. (JMB)

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Parents Can Tell Teachers About Teaching

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PARENTS CAN TEACH TEACHERS ABOUT TEACHING!

In a recent review of parenting and teaching, Gordon (1976) suggests that some parents are the very best teachers a child ever encounters. Today in early childhood education there is an emphasis on helping parents be more effective teachers of their young children. The work of White (1976), Ainsworth (1974) and Gordon (1974) shows that what is being taught parents is what has been learned from observing effective parents. This is an interesting situation because teachers are "teaching" parents what has been learned from parents - "the very best teachers of all", but parents are not "teaching" teachers what has been learned from parents.

Traditionally there has been a divided opinion on how good teaching should be described or defined. Since teachers themselves have been able to describe good parenting, some of the same aspects that define parenting might usefully describe good teaching.

What do parents do that is so effective? By reviewing studies in parenting we find that the meaningfulness of parents' success and the implications for teachers is especially visible in three important areas: 1) the use of affect when controlling children; 2) the organization of the setting for learning and; 3) the verbal direction and organization of the child's work.

Affect with Control

The relationship between parents and children is controlled to a great extent by the nature of the affective tie. Is it loving or hostile? Is there emotional involvement or emotional neutrality? In other words do adults treat children with warmth and nurture, as well as power and control? Do they demonstrate warmth and nurture as they use power and control, or do they use power with no nurture or warmth?

Parents are obviously important controlling individuals in the lives of young children. In repeated studies as long ago as 1964 Becker pointed out that parents who are non-nurturing, restrictive, and detached use, for the most part, various forms of power assertive techniques to control their children. Children from families where such interaction is common tend to display much more general aggression and resistance to authority than do children from homes where parents are involved with other forms of affect and control. Nurturing parents, for example, provide many imitable or observable learning experiences that are used as models by the child to modify his own behavior. The work of Becker (1964) shows that imitable behavior resulting in positive change is much more frequent in warm affective relationships, or when

the child sees the adult as an important person in his life. Warmth facilitates the modeling process because it makes the caretaker important to the child, and removes the need for more severe forms of punishment to gain compliance. When the caretaker is seen as important and the child has little fear of interacting, a strong positive attachment can be developed. Thus the child will find it pleasant to stay in the presence of the adult, increasing the opportunities for the child to learn through teaching and modeling. Bandura and Walters (1963) indicate that when an adult is attempting to control a child or teach him something important for his future functioning, this will be accomplished most effectively when a warm positive relationship exists.

The importance of warmth and nurture as conditions in child adult interactions certainly does not eliminate the use of power. However, it does temper the force and frequency of usage. When power is not used harshly and when it is linked with nurturing support it becomes effective in directing young boys and girls. Power is often very effective when positive emotional ties do not exist, because by itself the use of power can cause the child to do what is wanted, but by itself power seldom results in agreement on behavior. Usually the heavy use of power on the parents part leads to forms of hostility and even aggression on the child's part (Berkowitz, 1973).

We now have some very good studies done in Berkley by Baumrind (1971, 1972) that demonstrate that the relationship which is most effective in rearing children who show charateristics of effective socialization like competence, friendliness, involvement, and self control is one that combines parental warmth with parental control.

Both White (1976) and Baumrind (1970) indicate that effective parents set limits, are nurturing in their approach to the child, and give explanations for their approach to the child, and give explanations for their actions which include the child's point of view.

In reviewing the studies on effective parenting three variables appear to work in combination: positive affect which is described variously as warmth, nurture or love; control or demand which is essentially setting limits; and understanding that the child has an important perspective that should be considered.

The question still remains, "Can teachers assume parental childrearing techniques in their classroom, and be as effective as parents?" Help with the answer for this question comes from Spitz (1972) and Erikson (1972). Both men while speaking to a symposium on young children suggested that teachers could not be parent substitutes, but could and should be important caretaker alternates. These authorities felt that the important mission for teachers in developing children with competence was the understanding of a positive, affirming emotional relationship. Further validation for an answer to the question of a teacher's role in the school setting, comes from studies done at the Wiltwyck school in New York. This school which was directed by Ernst Papeneck set a milieu sensitive to affect, control, demand and the student's perspective in much the same way as the effective parent described by Baumrind and White. In 1956 McCord and McCord reported a longitudinal study of eighteen severely psychopathic young boys who were under the guidance of the Wiltwyck school staff for two years. The results of the investigation reveal some positive changes in behavior but even more startling, they indicate the development of conscience. These

psychopathic boys were learning the rudiments of socially approved behavior, as well as displaying achievement gains in school related tasks.

The Setting

In recent research Elardo, Bradley and Caldwell (1975) observed that the two main contributions of parents to the learning environment are the organization of the setting, and the provision for a variety of stimulation. The many concepts that children learn before they are five years old make it apparent that the learning experiences provided by the parents in the home are indeed effective. The observations of White and his colleagues (1974) in the Brookline Early Education Project show that the learning experiences provided by parents who are creating and organizing effective settings is very consistent with the descriptions provided by Hunt (1961) and Piaget (1967) of superior learning environments for all young children regardless of whether it is at home or in school.

Such settings allow the child to operate upon the environment by using stimulating materials in a variety of ways. The child works with the materials or ideas by continually exploring the problem solving opportunities that are presented; upon achieving mastery of certain concepts he goes on to new challenges; and in a few weeks he may return to the old material to consolidate knowledge or to use the materials in a different way to begin new conceptual learning.

Concept development is an important part of the young child's life with the parents in the home. The implication for teachers is clear: teachers of young children should provide a rich environment

that allows children to explore, manipulate, change, and create. Such an environment, ideally, might be something like a hardware store and artist's supply store combined, with teachers acting as effective organizers and resource persons.

Experience and problem solving activities inherent in a rich environment are at the heart of motivation, for Piaget (1967) indicates that the motivational aspects of learning for young children are inherent in the activity. Motivation according to Piaget is the amount of effort that is required to close the gap between the old learning and the new. Tasks that are either too hard or too easy are not motivational. When children are allowed to experiment in an organized environment, by using materials in unique ways they will find their own motivational requirements and thus establish appropriate levels of learning. Such motivating environments are desirable at school as well as at home.

In the rich, productive environment of the home there is time for experimentation, but skillful parents also provide time for thinking. Thinking time allows the child to develop and organize his thoughts. The child's cognitive powers are assisted in their development when parents control their demands and expectations for immediate responses while the child is in a problem solving situation. The outcome of this action by parents, as reported by Kagan (1971), is a high correlation between achievement in reading, intellectual ability, and reflective thinking. Teachers can incorporate this successful technique by simply allowing children time to reflect, develop and organize thoughts in problem solving situations.

Verbal Direction and Organization

The major studies of mother-child relationships by Hess and Shipman (1968, 1969) show that mothers of children who exhibit more fully developed thinking skills serve as verbal organizers and consultants for their children's work. These parents provided maximum opportunities for experimentation in settings that allow for problem solving situations to occur. Importantly, the parent seldom intruded upon the task and then only to act as a consultant or resource person when requested. As a resource person the parent redirected the child with open ended questions, provided labeling or clarifying responses, and when required reduced the level of difficulty. Seldom did the parent ask direct questions. When questions were asked they were not oriented to recall type answers, but assisted the child in thinking and reasoning. The child's most common response was a demonstration through activity with added verbal clarification.

Effective parent direction and organization of a child's task entails: explanation with instruction, the frequent use of praise, orientation of the child to the task with care, provision of specific feedback about the work, asking task oriented questions, and providing opportunities for experimentation. Hess and Shipman conclude that the mother's teaching style is as good a predictor of school success and intellectual functioning as is social class or mother's I.Q.

Some Generalizations for Teachers

Bloom (1964) tells us that a very large amount of a child's conceptual knowledge is developed by the time he is five years old, and another large portion by the time he is eight. What is important

about this for teachers is that this development as measured by Bloom occurred in homes where effective parenting was taking place. Children succeed in school according to Hunt (1971), when they have a learning style that permits them to solve the variety of problems presented in learning situations. Research shows that this learning style is facilitated by effective parents. It is not inappropriate to suggest that teachers of young children can extend the conceptual learning of their pupils, and assist them in the development of important learning styles if they use teaching techniques similar to those used by effective parents.

In summary, some strong and clearly visible threads run through the reports of studies dealing with parents and children. Words such as, expectation, demand when associated with warmth, affect, child's perspective, feedback, praise, experiment without adult interference, and rich environment appear with rather high frequency. All of them seem to be indicators of successful techniques used by parents who are socializing children effectively in the social sense, and who are also providing opportunities for cognitive growth. The same thing can happen in the classroom when teachers are aware of the significant areas of effectiveness.

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